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SYMBOLICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY.

JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY.

THE SINTOO CREED, OR PRIMITIVE RELIGION OF JAPAN.

IN order fully to understand the system of government in Japan, and the right by which the spiritual ruler, or *Mikado*, claims to hold his high, but, as will be afterwards seen, rather onerous, office, it is necessary that the reader should be made acquainted with the Japanese tradition respecting the creation of the world, and also with the principles of the religion of the country. We shall, therefore, proceed to give in this article a succinct account of the Japanese deities, premising that in the length of their names they almost rival some of the princes of the royal families of the continent.

Before the world was created, the Japanese believe that there was a confused mass of water, air, and earth, swaying to and fro on all sides, like the yolk of an egg mixed up with the white.

In this infinite space, which is entitled *Tako-mano-halo* (the plain of high heaven), arose *Ameno-minaka-nusino-kami*, self-created. His name signifies the superior god-like being who sits enthroned in the middle of heaven. After him came *Taka-mi-musu-bino-kami*, the highly elevated creating-god, and *Kamu-mi-musu-bino-kami*, the spiritually elevated creating-god. Each of these three primitive gods was independent of the other two.

At the time of the creation, the elements of chaos divided from each other. An under-stratum of the heavy and thick portions of the world was formed, while the clearer and lighter ones were carried upwards through their own want of weight. At first, though not sensible to the touch, they were visible, like smoke or a thick cloud. Gradually they formed themselves into the heavens, and, at last, attained such a degree of clearness as to become invisible.

The earth was still a young mass, as soft as mud, swimming about in the air, like the reflection of the moon in the waves, when there arose from it a kind of substance similar to the bud of the reed *Asi* (*Erianthus Japonicus*), and *Umasi-asi-kabi-hiko-dsino-kami*, the noble earth, god of the beautiful reed-bud, sprang into life; while *Ameno-soko-talsino-kami*, the architect of the vault of heaven, began and finished his creation.

Each of these two latter gods, also, like the first three, lived retired within himself, having nothing in common with the others. Combined with the former, they are peculiarly distinguished as *Amatsu-kami*, the five gods of heaven.

From the development and metamorphosis of *Asi-bud*, there arose between heaven and earth, the creator of firm land, by name *Kuni-soko-talsino-mikoto*. He reigned over the yet unfinished globe for more than a hundred thousand millions of years, a space of time which passes human comprehension. He is still worshipped in a temple of the district of *Oomi*.

His successor was *Kuni-sa-toutsino-mikoto*, who also reigned for a like extraordinary period, until *Toyo-kumu-suno-mikoto*, the god of the richly overflowing marshes, assumed the reins of power, which he retained for a hundred thousand million of years. He, too, has a temple erected to him in the district of *Oomi*.

These gods had lived alone, floating in the immensity of the universe, without any female companions. From this period, however, we find female divinities living with them in a state of sisterly innocence. First on the list stands *Wu-hidsi-nino-mikoto*, the god who cooks the muddy earth, with his companion *Su-hidsi-nino-makoto*, the goddess who cooks the sandy earth. Both are worshipped in a temple in the district of *Issye*.

After a lapse of two hundred thousand millions of years, they were followed by *Oo-to-tsino-mikoto*, and his companion, the goddess *Oo-to-beno-mikoto*.

These two divinities disappeared after having reigned as long as their predecessors, and were succeeded by *Omo-taruno-mikoto* and his companion *Kasiko-neno-mikoto*, who, after thousands and thousands of years had rolled away, made room, in their turn, for *Iza-na-gino-mikoto*, with his heavenly bride, *Iza-na-mino-mikoto*.

With this couple ends the period of the seven dynasties of the gods of heaven, which reaches up to *Kuni-soko-talsino-mikoto*; and it is to *Iza-na-gino-mikoto* that the creation of Japan is attributed.

Standing on the bridge that was floating in the heavens, *Iza-na-gino-mikoto* one day addressed his wife, *Iza-na-mino-mikoto*, in the following terms:—

"Verily, there should be somewhere or other a habitable country of the world; let us endeavour to find it in the waters which are heaving beneath us." Speaking thus, he dipped his spear, adorned with jewels, in the wide ocean, and stirred the waves round with it. The thick drops of water which trickled off the spear when he had withdrawn it from the waves, instantly thickened and formed an island, *Ono-koro-sima*, or the island that flowed together of itself. The god and his wife descended upon it, and together, by their divine power, created the other portions of the globe.

The next thing that *Iza-na-gino-mikoto* did, was to call into existence eight million of gods, who spread themselves simultaneously all over the country, commenced the development of its resources, and produced vegetation. *Iza-na-gino-mikoto* created also the ten thousand things from which the countless objects of every kind which we possess at the present day have all sprung. Meanwhile, the goddess *Iza-na-mino-mikoto* was not idle, but created the teregod, the godlike couple of the mountains containing metals, and the goddess of water. While, too, the climbing plants were raising their tendrils heavenwards from the earth, she planted under the waves the germs of the mosses, and ordered the goddess *Hani-yama-himeno-kami* to cover the hills with fruitful earth.

All the gods who had preceded *Iza-na-gino-mikoto* and his wife had started into existence of themselves, without being descended from any one. But *Iza-na-gino-mikoto* and *Iza-na-mino-mikoto* had a numerous family, the most virtuous member of which was their eldest daughter, *Ama-terasu-or-kami*, or, as she is otherwise generally denominated, *Ten-sioo-dai-zin*, the great spirit that lights the heavens. She was chosen by her parents as their successor in their earthly kingdom, over which she reigned in conjunction with her brother, *Tsukuyomi-mikoto*, the god-like moon that looks through the night.

After a lapse of 550,000 years, she resigned the empire to her nephew *Amano-osi-ho-mimino-mikoto*, whom she had adopted, and who, after a reign of 300,000 years, was succeeded by his son *Nini-gino-mikoto*, who, in his turn, was followed, after a reign of 318,533 years, by his son *Hiko-hobode-mino-mikoto*. The next divine sovereign, 637,892 years later, was *Wu-kaya-fuki-awasesuno-mikoto*, the last of the five earthly gods, his successor being *Zin-mu-ten-wooo*, whom he had by a mortal wife, and from whom, as we mentioned in our last chapter, the *Mikados*, or spiritual rulers of Japan, trace their descent—a fact which must, of course, entitle them to the respect and admiration of all those persons who esteem a man not for the noble actions he may do, but for the length of his genealogical tree. We have not the least doubt that the *Mikados*, if they were acquainted with the aristocracy of Europe, would look down on them as mere upstarts, in the same manner as the latter do on those by whose toil and energy they are supported in comparative but noble idleness.

The most ancient religion of Japan is intimately connected with the tradition we have just laid before our readers of the creation of the world. Taking its origin from the divine ancestors of the people, namely, the celestial and terrestrial gods, its religion has existed during countless generations of a good-hearted, simple population of fishermen and hunters, and has, up to the present time, maintained its position in the palace of the sovereign as well as the hut of the peasant. Although it is now no longer the sole religion of the Japanese empire, it is still protected by the state, revered by the rulers, and loved by the people.

This primitive religion is known in the Japanese language under the name *Kami-no-mitsi*, that is, the way or doctrine of the *Kamis*, or gods. It was not until a later period that the designation *Sintoo* (*Schin-tao*), which is merely a Chinese translation of the old Japanese expression, was bestowed upon it. The word *Sintoo* was used to designate the primitive religion, in contradistinction to the Indian ritual of *Bultoo* (*Tu-tao*), which was introduced into the country at a subsequent period.

The principle of the *Kami* ritual consists in the worship of the celestial beings who created the universe and the island empire of Japan, and of the terrestrial gods who animated the young country with their presence, and whose descendants afterwards became its inhabitants and rulers.

The greatest amount of veneration, however, is paid to *Ama-terasu-kami*, the goddess of the sun, the great spirit who illumines the heavens, and who, in company with her brother, the moon, floats over her island empire, while 8,000,000 spirits follow her and do her bidding. No mere mortal dare address her directly in prayer, but must do so through the medium of certain inferior *Kamis*, who, on this account, are called *Sjo-go-zin*, protecting, helping, or watching deities.

The spiritual sovereign, or *Mikado*, is always looked upon as being descended from the goddess of the sun, through *Zin-muten-wooo*, and it is believed by the *Sintoos* that her spirit animates each successive *Mikado*. They pay him divine honours, and believe that once in the course of every year all their gods assemble round his throne. His soul is held to be immortal, and on this doctrine is founded the popular belief of a continuance of existence after death. The *Sintoist* aims merely, it is true, at the attainment of earthly happiness, but he has still some notion, though faint and indistinct, of the immortality of the soul, and of an after-state of everlasting bliss or misery. He has also an idea of a reward for the good and a punishment of the bad, and a conception of some place or other whither the soul goes after this life. Heavenly judges require the soul to account for its actions. The good man's portion is paradise, *Taka-ma-naka-hara*, on entering which he is admitted to the realms of the *Kamis*. The wicked are punished and thrust down into hell, *Neno-kuni*.

The *Kami* religion lays down for the guidance of all believers who desire to attain earthly happiness and consolation hereafter a series of rules, which are in substance as follows:—To serve the *Kamis* a man must preserve pure fire. He must cherish belief and truth in his heart, make fresh and clean sacrifices, and pray to the *Kamis* to give him their blessing and prosperity, and to forgive him his faults. He must also beg that the sinner's soul may be purified, in order that he may be free from every ill.

It is, therefore, the endeavour of the conscientious *Sintoist*—

1. To preserve pure fire.
2. To typify by the cleanliness of his body the purity of his soul.
3. To keep festivals and holy days.
4. To undertake pilgrimages; and
5. To worship the *Kamis* both at home and in the public temples, and to offer up to them pure sacrifices.

Purity of body and soul is the principal article of the *Sintoo* faith. The purity of the soul consists in doing or leaving undone what the laws of nature respectively require or forbid, and also what the laws of the state and society demand.

The state of impurity is called *Fu-zjoo*. A man may be impure from the following causes:—

1. By the death of near relations; by contact with a corpse.
2. By the shedding of blood, or merely by his being spattered with blood, and by tasting the flesh of domestic animals.

The state of impurity does not extend to persons alone, but likewise to dwellings and other places in which any defiling event has occurred.

Another important point of the *Sintoo* faith is the due observance of the various festivals and holy days. From the moment of his birth to the instant of his death, the native of

Japan is engaged, either directly or indirectly, in their celebration. They lead him through the rolling year, reminding him, at certain months, days, and hours, of his duties towards his *Kamis*, his relations, his friends, his superiors, and himself. The acquirement of a proper knowledge of the various ceremonies to be used at these festivals constitutes one of the branches of a liberal education in Japan.

These festivals and holy days may be classed under the following heads:—Monthly festivals; yearly festivals of the whole population; anniversaries of the various *Kamis*; family festivals; lucky and unlucky days; days of prayer and penitence.

We now proceed to furnish the reader with some explanation of what the illustration which accompanies our remarks is intended to represent, that he may be able more easily to comprehend the artist's design. The first figure which attracts the reader's attention is that of the many-armed warrior, at the top of the picture. His name is *Maris'*, and tradition calls him powerful, persevering, brightly flaming. We recognise in him *Aries*, *Mavors*, or *Mars*, that mighty deity of the ancient *Scythians* and *Thracians*, that tutelary divinity who passed over with the *Pelagians* hordes to Greece, and whose sons founded Rome, the city of the seven hills.

Thus do we find, at the extreme opposite ends of Asia, the same idol, whose birth-place was central India. That this idol did really first come from India, is proved by the first syllable of his name, which is seen upon his shield in the old work, *Devanagari*, and his appearance, costume, and arms, lead us to the same conclusion.

To the left of *Maris'* we behold the holy *Foo*, who appears in the Japanese and Chinese sagas as a being who always forebodes good fortune and happiness. This bird-like being is very generally used in the decoration of all works of art, such as paintings, statues, or metal-work, and is especially adopted as an ornament for the household shrines that are to be found in the residences of the Japanese. The feathered creature to the right of *Maris'* is *Tengu*, the guardian of the heavens, herald of the gods, and protector of the *kamis* and their shrines, or *Mias*. This idol belongs to the *Sintoo* worship, where it is sometimes represented in human, and sometimes half-human shape, while at others it is pictured under the form of a perfect bird. It is placed at the principal entrance of the *Sintoo* temples, as a safeguard against evil spirits. It is also borne at the head of all the processions that set out from the temple before which it is placed.

In our engraving we have a representation of one of the many popular legends of Japan, namely, the fight of a hero with an eight-headed dragon. A painting of this subject, in very gaudy colours, is often to be seen in the *Sintoo* temples; and the priests of the temple which is erected to the hero of Yamato, near *Atsuta*, still relate it to the faithful. According to their account, an eight-headed devastating monster used yearly to appear in Yamato, and was to be appeased only by the sacrifice of a virgin descended from a race of kings. At last, however, a mountain hero, *Yamato-take*, came across the fire-belching monster, and engaging in single combat, killed it. This hero was, as history informs us, *Amato-mura humo*, a son of the *Mikado Kōi-koo-ten-wooo*, and a youth of rare strength and uncommon courage. His heroic deeds are recounted in the Japanese annals, which still preserve the memory of his conflict with the savages, who threw fire at him, but whom he destroyed by fire. They also mention in high terms his flame-like sword, which is now preserved as one of the three jewels of the empire. The Japanese used really to believe in the existence of monsters similar to the eight-headed serpent destroyed by the hero, and think that they were servants of the goddess of the sun, who sends them upon the earth to punish men for their misdeeds.

The above fable cannot fail to bring to every one's mind the combat of Hercules with the *Ternæan* hydra; and when the Japanese account goes on to state that *Koo-kano-samuroo*, a friend of the hero, descended with the latter to the infernal regions, where the monster dwelt, and that he held a torch while the combat was going on, we are still more struck with

its resemblance to the Greek tradition, in which Iolas seared the neck of the hydra as Hercules cut off the heads. The rock on which the hero is represented in the drawing as placing his foot, may easily have given rise to the fiction of the rock under which Hercules buried the hydra. The swampy dwelling of the latter is easily recognisable in the sketch.

Like the fables of all the ancient gods and heroes, these allegorical personages float in a kind of indistinct manner over Japan. All around them, however, are a number of typical forms relating to art, science, husbandry, and commerce, and which, as being sprung from facts and not fiction, appear in a much clearer and stronger light.

The reader will doubtless be struck with the bird-like vessel to the left. It is a representation of the *Tori-kame*, which has stood for ages, as large as life, before the Temple residence of the Mikado, and is a proof of the proficiency that creative art had attained at a most remote period.

Opposite this vessel, and borne by a Sintoo priest, is one of the five heavenly musical instruments; namely, the big drum. According to the popular belief, the great goddess that lights the heavens suddenly disappeared, and night lay upon the face of the celestial land. Having been affronted by man, she concealed herself in a cave, whence music alone could draw her forth and cause her to be reconciled to man. So high an origin do the Japanese assign to Music.

The fan, made of the plastic wood of the *arborvitæ*, and decorated with evergreen creepers, was in olden times considered an ornament for the prince's hand. At the present day we still see, at the court of the Mikado, the fan as simple and as plain as ever, in remembrance of the old manners and customs of the country; while, as the nation became more civilised and advanced, its taste for magnificence in all other objects save this one became more and more pronounced; witness the costly stuffs of gold and silk of which the Japanese are at present so fond.

The Japanese husbandman was acquainted with maize long before European nations were, and he has also cultivated pumpkins and melons, that have become acclimated in all countries of the globe for countless centuries. These natural products may be taken to indicate the flourishing state of horticulture and agriculture in Japan, but they may likewise be taken as evidence of the intercourse which must, in the earliest times, have united nations that were separated from each other by wide and surging seas.

The reader may, perhaps, at first be inclined to believe that in the *Bow* he simply beholds an ancient specimen of this national weapon. But the philologist will see in it more than the form of a mere weapon, and recognise the Chinese character signifying a bow, and taken from among those characters which belong to the infancy of the art of writing, which, as it appears in its present more mature condition, is represented in the little books opposite the bow.

Turning to another part of the picture, we behold Japan, commanded by the remarkable volcanic mountain, Fusi, and lighted by the rising sun. Cheerful industry ploughs its valleys and cultivates even its mountain sides. Secure and free from apprehension, commerce and activity go hand-in-hand, and animate the shores and harbours with countless sails.

In the foreground we behold, in a sitting posture, the Mikado *Ten-tse-tai-woo*, who reigned during the second half of the seventh century according to our reckoning. To this prince does Japan owe the rise of the arts and sciences. He was the first to found public schools and erect temples in honour of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. The Chinese characters which, at an earlier period, had been introduced into Japan, from Futara, a province of the neighbouring country of Corai, were by his exertions spread through the entire empire. This prince, too, who was himself a poet, endeavoured to elevate his native language; and the services he rendered in this particular still place him, even at the present day, at the head of the hundred poets who wrote in the old Jamato language.

By the Mikado's side, and standing out from the group of armed warriors, is the figure of his general, the Ziogoon. We have selected, in preference to any others, the portrait of the celebrated hero *Josimitsu*, who lived in the twelfth century, for the sake of showing the peculiar style of accoutrements worn in those days.

The portion of the drawing opposite the Ziogoon has reference to the people, their habits, and customs. It represents a scene from the ceremonies observed on the occasion of the new year, and shows a reigning prince, in the character of a father of a family, inviting good fortune into his house, and hoping that ill-luck will not enter it. He goes, at midnight, in state apparel, through his house, throwing about him, on all sides, roasted beans, and crying, "Evil spirit, avant; treasures, come in!" The impersonification of the evil spirit is worthy of remark, because it represents the devil as the people are taught to conceive him in the doctrines of Buddhism. It is with the greatest unwillingness that he obeys the exorcism compelling him to depart and allow riches and treasures to occupy his place.

The small chapel which rises in the background on a pyramidal pile of masonry, represents an ancient Sintoo sepulchre. The masonry consists of roughly-hewn blocks of basalt, and is exactly similar to the well-known Cyclopean walls. The walls of Japanese temples and fortresses are always built in this manner. The pillared gateway leads to the sepulchre, as is peculiar to the Sintoo faith. The pillars of such gateways are made of wood, stone, or bronze. They often rise to an immense height, and constitute a distinctly separate order in architecture.

In the foreground of the picture are some very remarkable objects which we have not yet explained. The three-footed vessel will afford the antiquary copious matter for comparison. The ornament in the form of a crocodile on the cover, the tortoise heads at the bend of the legs, and, in a word, the whole form of the vessel will not be viewed by him with indifference, when he finds similar ones upon the continents of Asia and America. In Japan this vessel is used as a censer on the altar of the tutelary household god.

The *magatama*, or crooked jewel, as well as ornaments and trinkets of the ancient Japanese, are lying near the Chinese coin *hanrio*, which was cast in China in the reign of the Chinese emperor Zin Schi Hoang-ti (220 B.C.) and brought to Japan, at a very early period, by Chinese immigrants.

As an instrument for giving the key-note, we see the old Pandean pipes, and as the war-trumpet, the shell of the Tritons. Among the warlike weapons, we perceive the axe of the Roman forces. We have, also, a representation of the magnet, which, as early as the seventh century, is mentioned in the Japanese annals as being a wheel that indicates the north. This proves it to have been known to other nations before it was discovered by the Europeans.

Considering the veneration paid to the goddess of the Sun, *Maris*, who was introduced into Japan at a much later period by the disciples of Buddha, and who is merely a god of an inferior order, occupies too elevated a position, if considered as the type or impersonification of the religion of the country. The picture, however, may be satisfactorily explained in the following manner.

Maris, the god of war, hovers over the empire of Japan, which owes its foundation to *Zin-shi-tai-woo*, the heavenly warrior, who united the various wild tribes into a nation, and was the ancestor of a dynasty that has lasted for more than two thousand years. *Maris*, therefore, is with propriety represented as continually floating above Japan, warding off evil with his many arms. *Foo*, the blessing of heaven, looks mildly down upon the peaceful mountains beneath him, while *Tengu*, the heavenly watcher, waves over this land of gods (*Zin-kok*) his sword against its foes. Bold and strong, *Yamato-take*, the conqueror of the many-headed monster, typifies the race of heroes who have at various times arisen from among a people which never bent beneath a foreign yoke, and which was never conquered since it was a nation.